

# Building the Polar Sled

## How the Wood and Iron were Selected and Dog Harness Made.

### EVERYBODY TURNED HUNTER

To Improve the Last Few Days of Fading Sunlight—Chase of Shore Game—Hares and Caribou Bagged for the Expedition—Dr. Cook Learned Much from his Predecessors in Polar Search—At Noon on October 24 Every Man of the Party Sought the Open to Take a Last Glimpse of the Dying Day.

Fourth Installment.  
THE CONQUEST OF THE POLE.  
By Dr. Frederick A. Cook.

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Storms now came up with such force and frequency that it was not safe to venture out in kayaks. A few walrus were captured from boats, then sea hunting was confined to the quest of seal through the young ice.

A similar quest was being followed at every village from Annotok to Cape York. But all sea activity would now soon be limited to a few open spaces near prominent headlands.

The scene of the real hunt changed from the sea to the land. We had as yet no caribou meat. The little auk gathered in nets during the summer, and elder duck, bagged later, disappeared fast when used as steady diet. We must procure hare, ptarmigan and reindeer, for we had not yet learned to eat with relish the fish, liver-like substance which is characteristic of all marine mammals.

Guns and ammunition were distributed, and when the winds were easy enough to allow one to venture every man sought the neighboring hills. Francke also took his exercise with a gun on his shoulder.

The combined results gave a long line of ptarmigan, two reindeer and sixteen hares. As snow covered the upper slopes the game was forced down near the sea, where we could still hope to hunt in the feeble light of the early part of the night.

No Anxiety for Winter.

With a larger fair, stocked and good prospects for other tasty meats we were spared the usual anxiety of a winter without winter supplies, and Francke was just the man to use this game to good effect, for he had a way of preparing our primitive provisions that made our dinners seem quite equal to a Holland house spread.

In the middle of October fox skins were prime, and then new steel traps were distributed and set near the many caches. By this time the Eskimos had all abandoned their sealskin tents and were snugly settled in their winter igloos. The ground was covered with snow and the sea was nearly frozen everywhere.

Everybody was busy preparing for the coming cold and night. The temperature was about 20 degrees below zero. Severe storms were becoming less frequent, and the weather, though colder, was less humid and less disagreeable. An ice fort was formed and the winter sledging was begun by short excursions to bait the fox traps and gather the fowls.

All these pursuits, with the work of building and repairing sleds, making dog harness and shaping new winter clothing, kept up a lively interest while the great crust which was to hold down the unruly deep for so many months, thickened and closed.

During the last days of brief sunshine the weather cleared, and at noon on October 24 everybody sought the freedom of the open for a last glimpse of the dying day. There was a charm of color and glitter, but no one seemed quite happy as the sun sank under the southern ice, for it was not to rise again for 118 days.

The Eskimos took this as a signal to enter a trance of sadness, in which the bereavement of each family and the discomfort of the year are enacted in dramatic chants or dances. But to us the sunset of 1907 was inspiration for the final work in directing the shaping of the outfit with which to begin the conquest of the pole at sunrise in 1908. Most expeditions have had the advantage of the liberal hand of a government or of an ample private fund. We were denied both favors.

But we were not encumbered with a cargo of misdeeds devised by hoarse dreamers, nor was the project handicapped by the usual number of novices, for while men at best must be regarded as amateurs compared with the expert efficiency of the Eskimo in his own environment. Our food supply contained only the prime factors of primitive nourishment. Special foods and laboratory concoctions did not fill an important space in ourarder.

Nor had we balloons, automobiles, motor sleds or other freak devices. We did, however, have an abundance of the best hickory, suitable metal and all the raw material for the sled and its accessories which was forthcoming to be linked to our destiny.

The sled was evolved as the result of careful study of local environment and of the anticipated ice surface northward. We did not copy the McClintock sled, with its wide runners, which has been used by most explorers for fifty years. Nor did we abandon the old fashioned iron shoes for German silver strips.

What a Polar Sled Should Be.

The conditions which a polar sled must meet are too complex to outline here. In a broad sense it seemed that the best qualities of the best wood Yukon sled could be combined with the local fitness of the Eskimo craft, with tough hickory ribs and sealskin lashings to make elastic joints. With plenty of native ingenuity to foresee and provide for the train of adaptability and endurance the possibilities of our sled factory were very good.

For dog harness the Eskimo patterns were adopted, but canine economy is such that when rations are reduced to workable limits the leather strips disappear as food. To overcome this disaster the shoulder straps were made of folds of strong canvas, while the traces were cut from cotton log line.

A boat is an important adjunct to every sledge base of operation. It is a matter of necessity, even when following the new coast line, as is shown by the mishap of Mylius Erickson; for if he had had a boat he would himself have returned to tell the story of the Danish expedition to East Greenland.

Need for a boat comes with the changed conditions of the advancing season. Things must be carried for several months for a chance use in the last stages of the return. But since food supplies are necessarily limited, delay is fatal. Therefore when open water prevents progress a boat becomes in the nature of a life preserver.

Foolish indeed is the explorer who ignores this detail of the problem. Transport of a boat, however, offers

many serious objections. Nansen introduced the kayak, and most explorers since have adopted the same device. The Eskimo canoe serves the purpose very well, but to carry it for three months without hope of destruction requires an amount of energy which stamps the polar venture with failure.

Selecting a Boat.

Sectional boats, aluminum boats, skin floats and other devices have been tried, but to all there is the same fatal objection of impossible transportation. It seems rather odd that the ordinary folding canvas boat has not been pressed into this service.

We found it to fit the situation exactly, selecting a twelve-foot Boreka shaped boat with wooden frame. The slats, spreaders and floor pieces were utilized as parts of sleds. The canvas cover served as a floor cloth for our sleeping bags. Thus the boat did useful service for a hundred days and was never in evidence as a cumbersome device.

When at last the craft was spread and covered, in it we carried the sled, in it we camped, in it we sought game, the meat of which took the place of exhausted supplies. Without it we, too, would not have returned.

Preparation of the staple food supply is of ever greater importance than means of locomotion. To the success of a prolonged Arctic enterprise in transit successive experience is bound to dictate a wise choice of equipment, but it does not often educate the stomach.

From the published accounts of Arctic travelers, it is impossible to select a satisfactory menu for future explorers, and I hasten to add that perhaps our experience will be equally unsatisfactory to subsequent victims.

Nor is it safe to listen to scientific advice, for the stomach is the one organ of the body which stands as the autocrat over every other human sense and passion and will not easily yield to foreign dictates.

The problem differs with every man. It differs with every expedition and it is radically different with every nation. Thus when De Gerlache forced Norwegian food into French stomachs he learned that there was a nationality in gastronomy.

Depending on Eskimo Food.

In this respect, as in others, I was helped very much by the people who were to line up my forces. The Eskimo is ever hungry, but his taste is normal. Things of doubtful value in nutrition form no part in his dietary. Animal food, meat and fat, is entirely satisfactory as a steady diet without other adjuncts. His food requires neither salt nor sugar, nor is cooking a matter of necessity.

Quantity is important, but quality applies only to the relative proportion of fat. With this key to the gastronomy of our lockers pemmican was selected as the staple food, which also served equally well for the dogs. We made an ample supply of pemmican, made by Armour of powdered dried beef, sprinkled with a few raisins, some currants and a small quantity of sugar. This mixture was cemented together with heated beef tallow and run into tin cans containing six pounds each.

This combination was invented by an American Indian. It has been used before as part of the long list of food-stuffs in Arctic products, but with us it was the whole bill of fare when away from game haunts.

Only a few palate surprises were carried and these will be indicated in the narrative of camp life. The entire winter and night were spent with busy hands, under direction of Eskimo and Caucasian ingenuity, in working out the clothing and camp comforts, without which we could not invade the forbidden mysteries of the polar basin.

Although we did not follow closely either the routes or methods of our predecessors, we are, nevertheless, doubly indebted to them for their experiences, including their failures, were our stepping stones to success.

The Fifth Installment of Dr. Cook's Story will be printed in The Bulletin of Saturday, September 25.

Entitled to Some Credit.

While credit is being passed around, let not John R. Bradley, the man who backed Explorer Cook, be forgotten. He furnished motive power needed and will go into history—Springfield Republican.

And You Can't Swat Him!

When a man tells you he wants to say something to you "as a friend," you know he is going to criticize you in a way your enemy would not attempt.—Chicago Evening Post.

#### Charm of Poverty.

To the Editor of The Sun.—Sir: I said to a man the other day: "Isn't comparative poverty delightful? I am comparatively poor, and so am compelled to hear the truth. Every one is quite blunt with me. I am not in society, and so don't have the supreme felicity of ministering to the caprices of women, or listening to their adulations, for a woman rarely sets her cap at a poor man. I don't have to attend to idiotic entertainments, where all the men dress alike, looking like waiters or undertakers, and all the women are undressed alike as to their arms, necks and shoulders. I don't have to chatter, grimace, dance, eat and drink until 3 o'clock in the morning. No woman would ever condescend to break my heart, and I have lots of friends—my books. Now—what's your opinion?"

My friend, who was a lawyer, answered forcibly that I was an ass. He spoke most freely, and did not even change to his own opinion. I wonder if he was entirely right?

PHILOSOPHER.  
New York, Sept. 8. —N. Y. Sun.

#### The Triumphant Cooks.

It was Captain Cook who first sailed around the world, and it was Dr. Cook who first hitched his sled to the North pole. It is the cooks that rule the universe.—St. Cloud (Minn.) Journal-Press.

#### Fine Place for Him.

W. T. Stead says he may yet have to go to the North pole himself. And the civilized world hastens to remark: "Second the motion!"—Pittsburg Gazette-Times.

#### Flying From Them.

Secretary Ballinger claims to have come out of his hole with knockout flying colors, but he hasn't exhibited the skins of the snakes he promised to kill.—Houston Post.

#### When Roosevelt Gets Back.

It was the talk in Washington before the inauguration that Roosevelt would cross the country on his return. He himself discussed such a trip. It would be a parade famous in the annals of grand tours. He could not if he would avoid saying things, and even if he desired to stick to Taft he would not be silent concerning "my policies." He would make some speeches that would shake the dry bones.

It is idle even in the face of the president's coming journey to cover up the fact that there is a growing disposition to look to Roosevelt's return as the signal for a break to progressive leadership, a restoration at Washington of aggressive and courageous "come on" policies. The country took the president as a Roosevelt man, if there is a growing conviction that he is not of the Roosevelt metal it is only natural, that, as the real Roosevelt is barely 50 and full of fight, there should be a looking to the blown-in-the-bottle article.—Des Moines (Ia.) Register and Leader.

#### Other Kind of Kings.

The Springfield Republican says that "all the kings in Europe might abdicate tomorrow and, as a sensation, it would fail." At the same time, four kings at certain moments have their value.—New Haven Courier.

#### Gives It a Chance.

George Fred Williams having announced that he is done with politics for the present, there seems to be some hope for the democratic party in Massachusetts also.—Providence Journal.

#### Not a Roosevelt Principle.

At any rate it was very bad form for Dr. Cook to go off there all by his lonesome and discover the pole without giving any warning.—Philadelphia North American.

#### Probably Struck by Spent Bullet.

At Wilton, Justus K. Raymond was found unconscious in the yard of his home the other day with a wound, as if from a bullet, on the right side of his head. He was carried into the house and medical attendance summoned. He was able to be about the next day, but could recall nothing of how he was wounded. The theory is that he was hit by a spent bullet from the gun of a hunter. He is 60 years old.

His mother is 90 years old and one of the three real daughters of the Revolution still living in this state.

#### A Feature Not Wanted.

A pessimistic Frenchman suggests that neither Cook nor Peary has hit the pole. If this be true, prospects are fine for a double lynching bee as one of the features of the Hudson-Fulton celebration.—Washington Times.

#### A Hardened Sinner.

Mr. Aldrich is well along in years,

and in the ordinary course of nature he cannot expect to last a great while longer, but he seems utterly unrepentant.—Chicago Tribune.

#### A Narrow Escape.

Edgar N. Baylis, a merchant of Robinsonville, Del., wrote: "About two years ago I was thin and sick, and coughed all the time, and if I did not have consumption, it was near to it. I commenced using Foley's Honey and Tar, and it stopped my cough, and I am now entirely well, and have gained twenty-eight pounds, all due to the good results from taking Foley's Honey and Tar." The Lee & Osgood Co.


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